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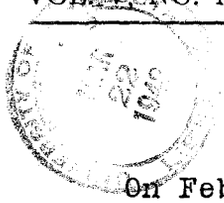

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

by Constantin Fotitch

On February 25 the light of freedom, already dimmed, was completely extinguished in Czechoslovakia. Then President Benes, yielding to brutal pressure from his Communist Prime Minister, Klement Gottwald, legalized the new dictatorship and bowed to the ukase of the Kremlin. Thus a seventh European country -- not counting the Baltic States -- came under Soviet domination and Communist dictatorship. With Czechoslovakia, a total of approximately ninety million decent and self-respecting Europeans have now been sacrificed for alleged Soviet security.

The capitulation to Gottwald must have been even more tragic for President Benes than the capitulation to Hitler in 1938. Hitler was the foe who did not conceal his enmity. But the blow prompted by Stalin came from a professed friend of Czechoslovakia and its President.

In London, in April, 1943, Benes told me that, as a realist in politics, he could not overlook the fact that post-war Czechoslovakia would have the powerful Soviet Union as a neighbor, whereas the Western Allies would be far away. This alone would move him to do everything in his power to reach an agreement with the Soviet, thereby removing any suspicion they might have toward him. President Benes was prepared to go a long way in collaboration with the Soviet Union -- up to the point where the independence of the country would be endangered.

So it was also with Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk, who paid with his life for the belief that an honest man can work with the Communists. My mind goes back to a conversation Masaryk and I had on this very subject in Atlantic City, in December, 1943.

The occasion was the conference for the organization of UNRRA. Relations between the Yugoslav Government-in-Exile and the Soviets had by then deteriorated almost to the breaking point. Masaryk asked me, during a long promenade on the boardwalk: "Why is it that you can't get along with your Communists? Why not patch up your difficulties and find a way to collaborate? We are getting along fine with them. Whenever I submit a proposal to the Council of Ministers, the Communist

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members of the Government are first to give their support. The same goes here in our delegation in Atlantic City. The Communists are always anxious to show their readiness to collaborate and to please."

Knowing Masaryk's friendship and that he wanted to be helpful, I replied: "We tried our best but to no avail. Maybe we are not flexible enough. But above all you haven't a Tito to cope with, and I sincerely hope you never will have."

To win Soviet friendship, both Benes and Masaryk made very important concessions to the Soviet Union. We need only recall the humiliating cancellation of Czechoslovakia's acceptance of participation in the Marshall plan last June. President Benes probably said to himself that this would be the last concession, since the Soviet demands had reached the point where the independence of his country was endangered. Unfortunately, that was the last concession which the Soviet needed in order to impose Communist dictatorship on the country by legal and constitutional means.

II

From now on Gottwald and his obedient henchmen have the power to legalize all measures, coming with mathematic precision, to put the country under the absolute control of Moscow.

It is significant that dictators are anxious to cloak even their most brutal acts with a mantle of legality, which anxiety they displayed this time also. Gottwald, acting on orders from Moscow -- with the Assistant Soviet Foreign Minister Zorin at hand to supervise the operation -- would have proceeded toward the goal assigned him in any case. But before resorting to force he made a last attempt to obtain Benes' consent, and succeeded. For the Communists this was important. They can now pretend to be representing the will of the people and acting as true democrats.

The Nazis were equally punctilious in the formalities. Hitler, before entering Austrian territory in 1938, engineered the formation of a new government in Vienna, which then invited the Fuehrer to come in. In March, 1939, before occupying Bohemia, Hitler pursued President Hacha, Benes' successor and predecessor, around the conference room in the Reich Chancery for almost a whole night. Finally he exacted from that broken man the invitation graciously to invade his country.

The Soviet technique is identical with, but rather more subtle than, that of the Nazis. In June, 1941, when the Baltic States were swallowed, the new Communist government in Riga staged "spontaneous" manifestations clamoring for incorporation of Latvia in the Soviet

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Union. To their great surprise the manifestations of Latvian Communists were broken up by the Russian military police. The Soviets wanted the incorporation of Latvia to result from the people's will "freely" expressed at elections and not from pressure of the street mobs.

In September, 1944, the Soviets badly needed a legal pretext for the invasion of Bulgaria, which within a few hours was due to sign an armistice with the Western Allies. So Moscow declared war to justify the sending of troops to install a puppet government. That was a dress rehearsal for the one week's war with Japan -- to gain Manchuria, northern Korea and the Kurile Islands.

In my own country, Tito, while comfortably living in Vershatz at the headquarters of Marshal Tolbuhin, gave permission to the Soviets to enter Yugoslavia. This established legal grounds for denying entry to Allied troops. The Soviets did not want American and British troops in Yugoslavia, although this would have speeded up the defeat of the German Army in southern Europe and shortened the war considerably.

III

Gottwald probably acted for two main reasons: First, to break Czechoslovakia's connection with the West and to discourage the Czechs, as well as others behind the iron curtain, from expecting any assistance from the West.

It is always to be remembered that the defeat of the Marshall plan remains the immediate objective of the Soviet foreign policy, openly announced as such by Andrei Zhdanov, one of the most influential members of the Politburo. Czechoslovakia yielded reluctantly to Soviet orders not to participate in the Marshall plan. Just a few days before the Communist coup, the now purged Czechoslovak Minister for Foreign Trade, Hubert Ripka, stated that his country would strive to improve its economic relations with Western countries. Therefore drastic measures had to be taken to put an end to such illusions and to bring Czechoslovakia securely behind the iron curtain.

The second reason for Gottwald's actions was of a domestic nature. In the general election of May, 1946, the Communists in Czechoslovakia polled 38 per cent of the votes. Reliable information indicated that they would lose heavily in the elections scheduled for this May. For the sake of prestige Moscow could not afford even a partial setback, with repercussions in other countries behind the iron curtain.

Therefore Gottwald was ordered to act in order to prepare a tested formula for the next elections. The set-up is familiar: A "popular front" dominated by Communists but containing a few renegades from other

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parties; a single list presented to the electorate, which has only nominal choice; exclusion from voting of "reactionaries and enemies of the people"; suppression of the opposition press.

The result of such "elections" is determined in advance and the new "popular front" is assured of a resounding majority.

IV

With the gleichschaltung of Czechoslovakia the decks are cleared for further Soviet action toward the West. The French Foreign Minister, Georges Bidault, sees in the Communist seizure of Czechoslovakia a threat for the survival of all democracies. Pathetically he exclaims: "It is a ringing alarm signal for the world." The fears of Mr. Bidault are shared by every true democrat in Europe who must ask himself: "Whose turn is next?"

Presumably the next major stroke will be in Italy, where general elections are slated for April 18. Here the Cominform is in the best position to make its influence felt. From neighboring Yugoslavia the Cominform, through its trusted agent Tito, will effectively assist the Italian Communists. Northern Italy, with its huge industrial population, is a particularly fertile ground for Cominform activities. A Communist putsch originating in northern Italy could easily be camouflaged as expressing "the will of the people" and their desire for the new type of "democracy", to which only Wall Street and "warmongers" could logically object!

The loss of Finland is taken for granted. Whether the next coup will come in Greece, Italy or France is a matter of conjecture. But one thing is certain. The Kremlin will do everything possible to make good Zhdanov's threat. This was that "the Soviet Union will make all efforts to see that the Marshall plan is not realized".

However, it is obvious that the Czechoslovak tragedy has greatly helped to bring the people of Western Europe together. It already has brought Great Britain, France and the Benelux countries into a fifty-year alliance, looking toward economic and political union. This, with the United States in the background, coupled with adoption of the European Recovery Program by Congress, is the first practical step toward saving what remains of Europe.

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events VOL. V, NO. 11

By Frank C. Hanighen March 17, 1948

Senator Taft showed prudence on Sunday, March 14, when he commented on the developing international tension. He remarked that he had "no reason" to believe Russia was intent on any "immediate aggression"; and added, "If President Truman and General Marshall have any private intelligence to that effect they ought to tell the American people about it". In short, the Senator avoided the error of Borah who in 1939 predicted that there would be no war in that year.

Perusal of the President's address to Congress reveals no "private intelligence" about "immediate aggression". Behind the many negative reactions among Members of Congress is a genuine skepticism -- more than usual this year -- about the sincerity of Administration moves, both foreign and domestic. For instance, early this week, when the coal miners walked out, observers were quick to speculate on the Administration's attitude. They recalled that President Truman, late in 1946, at a time when his popularity had touched a low point, did regain much favor by acting strenuously against John L. Lewis. Today, in an even more serious political position, is he choosing the same path? And is he likewise utilizing the foreign situation? This question is being asked frequently in Washington -- and not always in a spirit of partisanship.

On the other hand, it is noted that even some military leaders, who have never lent themselves to political strategy, now "have the wind up". Any objective view of the Italian situation does not inspire complacency. Senator Taft, indeed, rashly assumed the dangerous role of a prophet when he expressed doubt that the Communists would win the crucial Italian election. It is, of course, correct to say that our military situation in Europe has been bad right along; and many pardonably draw the conclusion that the present burst of Presidential concern about our defense establishment is just a case of election year "timing". Nevertheless, the thoughtful are wary because the Administration's "timing" may coincide with the Kremlin's.

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Inclusion of the Germans in the Marshall plan organization was announced in Paris on March 16. The move contemplates not only help in rebuilding Germany, but also help to the rest of Western Europe from German skills and industry. The announcement was followed immediately by semi-official Washington comment as to further utilization of German abilities. It was pointed out that the present rapid drawing-together of Western European nations in face of Communist aggression includes military co-operation between the various Western States. It was suggested that logically the next step should be the tapping of German military knowledge. This does not mean creation of a German army. But it does mean, it was stated, Western Europe's utilization of the skills and experience of many German staff officers now "at liberty" in the Western zones.

As a matter of fact, it develops that such a course has already been initiated by the American Army in Germany. It is reliably reported that General Clay's organization has started to tap the extensive background of military knowledge of former German officers, some of them of high rank. These officers are men who were purged by Hitler early in the war because they were anti-Nazi. The group includes one well-known General, and is being expanded by the addition of a number of former officers of the German General Staff.

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Too much publicity has been devoted to Russia's actions in Finland and Czechoslovakia; too little to a Soviet move in quite another sphere. Two weeks ago, Russia appointed as new Ambassador to Turkey, Alexander Lavrishev, known as a Mos-

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cow "trouble shooter". Lavrishev, 36, was sent to Bulgaria and Albania before the purges in both those countries, and served as Soviet delegate on the ill-fated Greek Border Commission of the UN. He is compared to the late Constantin Oumansky, one time Soviet Ambassador to the United States. Oumansky was by far the most dynamic Soviet envoy in the Western Hemipshere and was credited with creation of the Communist network throughout Latin America, at the time he served in Mexico City.

Lavrishev was appointed to Ankara at a time when the Turkish Republic was showing disgruntlement about its share in the Marshall plan. It is believed that his mission is to increase the Turkish discontent with the Western Powers; and if possible to create a Soviet fifth column in a country which has been notably free from such an evil. Unconfirmed reports suggest that Lavrishev's job also includes presentation of a request for a Soviet-Turkish mutual defense pact, like that proposed for Finland. However, in Washington, it is claimed that in the past fortnight the State Department has acted in time to remove Turkish dissatisfaction; and that M. Lavrishev will encounter difficult odds when he arrives in Ankara.

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Two decades of Fascism have left the Italian Socialists so politically uneducated that their adhesion to the Communists may bring Italy under the iron curtain. The Communists have drawn the Left Wing Socialist Party (the bulk of the Socialists) into the Communist-dominated bloc known as the "Democratic Popular Front"; and these Socialist votes may tip the scales when voters go to the polls at the crucial election on April 18. Many Italian workers support the Front not because they are pro-Communist, but because they are anti-capitalist.

If Mussolini had not ruled Italy for a score of years, this situation would probably not have arisen. While Italy suffered from a one-party rule, the Socialists in France and in other Western European countries (including Spain) were absorbing some bitter, but salutary, education. They learned the essentially pro-Russian and totalitarian nature of the Communist Party and became wary of alliances with the Communists. The French Socialists received some unforgettable lessons during the Popular Front era in the Thirties and from their relations with the Communists in the Resistance. Hence Socialist Premier Ramadier stood unflinchingly against the Muscovites in the strike crisis last winter.

If Italy had plenty of time for such education, the Italian Socialists would doubtless learn the "hard way". There is a Right Wing fraction of the Socialists, the Labor Socialist Party, under Giuseppe Saragat, but it attracts few voters at present. This party is young and requires months, perhaps years, to proselytize and grow. With the election only five weeks off, it is, indeed, a case of "so little time".

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The revolution in Costa Rica, which was first reported March 13, so far has not aroused much comment in the United States. It is customary to dismiss most pronunciamentos as springing from a struggle by the "ins" to overthrow the "outs". However, in the past few days there has been one indication that something more than a caudillo's personal ambitions may be at stake. An Associated Press dispatch on March 15 from the capital, San Jose, says in part: "Jules Dubois, a Latin American correspondent for the Chicago Tribune, has been placed under house arrest at the Gran Hotel. . . . Dubois, a Colonel in [U.S.] Military Intelligence during the war, tried to send a story in which he said: 'Twenty-four hours of revolt against the Communist control of this republic, located at the northeast flank of the Panama Canal, produced a toll of seven dead, 30 wounded and 25 persons captured by Government troops'." Dubois' dispatch may be unfair to the Government of Presi-

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dent Michalski; but it is recalled in Washington that his career in Military Intelligence, Latin American section, was distinguished, and that he had many years experience in the Caribbean.

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Conversation during the luncheon hesitantly approached the Thing. Washington traditionally has been the chattiest of capitals, the place where nothing is sacred and all secrets legitimately are violate. But now there is a subject before which the most irresponsible gossips quail.

The luncheon was in the Pentagon and the talk touched on the case of Dr. Condon, Bureau of Standards scientist, now under investigation by the House Un-American Activities Committee. One officer at the table remarked: "The Doctor may be all right, but he was pretty indiscreet. Imagine anyone, possessing such information as the Doctor, being seen with anybody from that spy-center up on 16th Street. I mean the Polish Embassy. There are things you just don't do, these days. There are positions into which you don't put yourself."

"That's right", remarked another, "and that reminds me of Colonel X. His office was moved and he found himself in the same room with another officer who, it turned out, had much to do with high-level information about the atomic bomb. Colonel X developed a bad case of jitters, and applied for a change of office." "Remember that atomic bomb case last year?" asked one man. "The one out in a western state? The case involved two dumb non-coms who took home some innocuous pictures from the atomic files. It didn't amount to anything. But at the court hearing, a Military Intelligence officer introduced an exhibit of confidential documents and pictures. The attorneys and jurymen were so scared they wouldn't examine the stuff. They preferred to accept the evidence on the intelligence officer's word."

It was a newspaper reporter who had the last, and most impressive, word on the subject: "As you know, I'm not exactly bashful when unpublished news is offered to me. But, if one of the high officers down here volunteered to give me data on the manufacture of the bomb, I'd turn tail and run. There are some things I'd rather know nothing about."

Now it is undoubtedly reassuring to know that a major weapon of our forces is shrouded in such secrecy. Also it may be that some can draw the comfortable conclusion that there's no need of official censorship with such voluntary censorship in existence. But after lunch we thought it over. A new and decidedly sinister element has come into the atmosphere. Rebelliously, one used to sneer, "You Can't Print That". Today, with submissiveness, one says, "You Can't Talk About That".

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Among those with short memories, there is a tendency virtually to canonize the unfortunate Jan Masaryk. Many who knew him can testify to his fine qualities. But it is well to remember that his recent public career was hardly in the great tradition of his father. Paul W. Ward in the Baltimore Sun (March 11) reports: "A Latin-American diplomat recalled . . . his shock when the Czechoslovak delegation under Masaryk's leadership opposed at the 1945 San Francisco Conference a Panamanian proposal to write into the United Nations Charter a guarantee of the territorial integrity and political independence of all Member States. He said he had expected to see Masaryk, as spokesman for a country which had been dismembered by the Munich agreement of 1938, be a vigorous advocate of such an effort to prevent a repetition.

"It was also recalled that at the 1945 conference Masaryk avowedly put aside the liberal principles of his father to demand that Czechoslovakia be allowed free rein to drive from her territory all persons of German or Magyar descent, no matter how many generations their families might have been living in his country."

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Book Events

The American Language: Supplement II, by H. L. Mencken. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, $7.50. Reviewed by J. M. Lalley.

Mr. Mencken, having arrived at an age of humility, says that he claims for this book no other virtue than "the homely virtue of diligence". The 900-odd good-sized pages of text and footnotes amply sustain this modest claim. The present work is an amplification of the latter section of Mr. Mencken's celebrated treatise on the national idiom; the earlier chapters of which, you may recall, were enlarged in another supplement, published about three years ago. Thus the addenda are now about twice as voluminous as the original work, published in 1919.

The most interesting contrast between the supplementary and the original material is that Mr. Mencken now seems less inclined to labor his former thesis that the divergence between the spoken language of Great Britain and that of the United States has grown so wide as to make them separate tongues, almost alien to each other. I think it is generally acknowledged that this would have been the case, in the absence of any common literature; but a great deal of the fascinating evidence assembled by the laborious scholarship of Mr. Mencken seems to support the conclusion of Professor McKnight that the American idiom is in many ways the more timorous and conservative, in that it betrays the plainer marks of the library and schoolroom, with consequent impairment of its flexibility and spontaneity. Mr. Mencken, of course, still inclines to the opposite view, resting his case on what he calls the "Common Speech", meaning the vernacular of those Americans who have been least exposed or have remained most impervious to literary and pedagogical influences. This vernacular has, as Mr. Mencken shows, uniformities which provide it with a grammar and syntax of its own, but he is also obliged to show that some of its peculiarities are apparent survivals of archaic English dialectical usages. It is mainly in the production of slang and neologisms that Americans exhibit the boldness and proliferation so often attributed to them. Mr. Mencken seems uncertain whether a line can be drawn between slang and professional argot; but in any case, a glance through his chapter on the subject shows the highly perishable character of such inventions. Indeed, it suggests that with some rare exceptions, the only words of slang origin that become permanently absorbed in the language are those which, by some process of metaphor or onomatopoesis, have provided easy, vivid and appropriate terms for various objective innovations, such as new mechanical devices, new technical processes and new trades and specialties.

At bottom, questions raised by Mr. Mencken's studies are how languages are made and who makes them. Mr. Mencken certainly would agree with Ben Jonson that it is not the writers but the people who make them. As far as dialects are concerned, this is incontestably true, but it does not explain why one dialect rather than another becomes ascendant. Is there any reason to believe, for example, that without Chaucer, Caxton and others the dialect of the East-Midlands would have superseded all other English dialects as the mainstream of English idiom? We have the same problem in attempting to estimate the influence of Hollywood and the radio on the evolution of American speech. "Loo, what shoulde a man in thyse dayes now write, egges or eyren?" That question at least has been decided, but there are other questions on which we still stand abashed "bytwene playn rude and curyous". But, of course, the great value and interest of Mr. Mencken's labors do not lie so much in the generalized conclusions that he or his readers may draw from them, but in the character of the philological lore he has gathered. One might cite as examples his revelation of the principles and methods followed by the Pullman Company in the nomenclature of its sleeping and chair cars and those followed by the telephone companies in christening their exchanges.

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